



Vulnerable Veterans, Halting the revolving door.

Overview:

There is a small but significant cohort of veterans¹ who leave the armed forces and do not thrive in civilian life. Some of these ex-service personnel, reserves or family members fall into crime or homelessness (Ashcroft, 2014).

The Vulnerable Veterans Programme aims to:

- Identify the number of ex-service personnel imprisoned or on licence in Surrey.
- Benchmark the support available to veterans, reserves and their families so that service users can be signposted to support appropriate to their needs.
- To create and train a team of “Go to Guys/Girls” or mentors [G2Gs] to support ex-service personnel in contact with the Criminal Justice System [CJS].
- To prevent ex-service personnel and their families from becoming victims of crime.

There is growing interest about veterans in the CJS. Government, academic researchers, criminal justice agencies are all working to establish how many veterans there are and the reasons they have offended. Some of the focus of this work has been on the issues of addiction, housing and post traumatic stress disorder [PTSD] (MacDonald 2014).

Executive Summary:

This report benchmarks where the Vulnerable Veterans Programme is now and forms the basis for the longitudinal section of our work. We have brought together new data from Surrey Police, HMPS, the probation service, Armed Forces Covenant champions, Veterans Groups and Charities. The collection of new and more focussed data is ongoing. This will feed into our report at the completion of this programme.

There is a lot of support available for veterans and their families provided by many organisations, nationally, geographically and by arm of service. This support has been improved with the introduction of the Armed Forces Covenant (Phillips 2014) but there are areas of overlapping support (SSAFA 2016). Research reveals one hundred and forty three military charities alone that support ex-service families in Surrey.

A small but significant number of Veterans and Reserves fall into crime or through self-neglect become homeless. A large proportion of those who turn to crime can be identified and supported to stop offending and remain out of the criminal justice system (Project Nova 2015).

The Vulnerable Veterans Programme is working to secure and confirm data on the number of ex-service personnel imprisoned or on licence in Surrey. Previously data has been estimated (Ministry

¹ There are currently upwards of 4 million veterans in the UK (Phillips 2014)

of Defence 2010, BBC 2008). Alongside this we are working with Surrey's transformational justice programme to divert ex-service personnel from going to prison or leaving prison never to return.

However there is a reluctance on the part of some ex-service personnel to admit their previous role through embarrassment, fear of being shunned when applying for jobs or for fear of attack when in prison (Packham 2013). Some simply feel they have failed and withdraw from society ending up at risk of victimisation and homelessness. More work needs to be done with the civilian professionals who veterans meet to encourage accurate reporting (Ministry of Defence 2010).

The Vulnerable Veterans Programme is currently supporting five veterans and has identified a group of eight volunteers who are prepared to undergo our trainee G2G programme which is currently under test.

It is known that for every pound invested in diverting an offender from prison four pounds are saved and that the Vulnerable Veterans Programme would be paid for by simply preventing one ex-services member from being imprisoned.

Data Sources:

The data sources for this initial report come from official reports, independent academic research 3rd Sector sources and our own investigative research. We have interviewed prison and police officers, veterans, council staff, charitable case workers and Armed Forces Covenant champions. We have researched psychological journals, with the Ministry of Defence, the Ministry of Justice, news feeds and the internet.

Limitations:

The data that we have received is the very best available to us at the present yet there are issues with the age of some data sets. There are some currently unresolved conflicts between data, particularly those supplied by (charitable) practitioners and government bodies. Furthermore some key data has yet to be confirmed with the organisations who have supplied them. As a result we have an investigative programme about to start with Surrey Police and other organisations. Further pilots are anticipated and our final report will reflect these works. This report reflects only two months of the six month programme.

Results:

We have visited 32 organisations involved in the support of veterans, reserves and their families. 20 have been specifically ex-armed services facing and 12 who have a wider remit but who engage with veterans.

Of these four assist homeless people and one that specifically assists vulnerable veterans who need shelter².

We currently receive introductions to Vulnerable Veterans from the Surrey Heath Veterans & Families - Listening Project, The Royal British Legion and Mike Jackson House. We have received a self-referral and we undertake our own outreach interventions.

We have met with 87 veterans, 11 who are homeless and 12 who are vulnerable and in contact with the CJS.

² It is a sad reflection of the times when there are some 15 rough sleepers on the street in Aldershot by 1830hrs of whom 3 admitted that there were ex-forces.

The Vulnerable Veterans Programme is currently working with 5 veterans and has a bank of 8 volunteers who are prepared to undergo our trainee G2G mentoring programme that is currently under test.

We are assisting in the creation of a new veterans self-help group starting in September 2016.

Findings:

The great majority of those who serve in the Armed Forces return to civilian life without problem and are statistically less likely than their civilian counterparts to commit criminal offences. Those who do tend to be older and are more likely to be male³. They typically use alcohol and turn violence to resolve issues. This small minority have difficulties and find themselves in trouble with the law.

Their offending behaviour is unlikely to have been directly caused by their service in the Armed Forces, but is sometimes contributed to by their experiences (Phillips 2014). One hundred and forty three service charities offer help to these individuals in Surrey (OPCC for Surrey 2016).

Post-traumatic stress disorder is often used to explain offending behaviour of offenders who have served in the Armed Forces, yet poor mental health and substance misuse often contribute to their offending (Grimshaw, 2016). Other other risk factors such as homelessness and unemployment also contribute to potential offending behaviour.

Suicide within the ex-armed forces community is recognised and has been studied (Kapur, While, Blatchley, Bray, and Harrison, 2009) but has not been identified as a major risk at this early stage in our programme. It is covered in our G2G mentor training.

The Armed Forces Covenant exists to recognise the sacrifices made by those who serve⁴, demands the identification and appropriate treatment of vulnerable veterans at the earliest possible stage, both for their benefit and that of their families, as well as the public (Ministry of Defence 2013). Offenders should in future be asked at every stage of the criminal justice system whether they have served in the Armed Forces (Royal British Legion 2011, Phillips 2014).

However researchers continue to be hindered by the absence of robust data enabling the identification of pathways effective in preventing offending on the part of those who have served in the Armed Forces. It would be helpful in the support of vulnerable veterans and their families if such data was routinely collected.

Conclusions:

It has been found that there is a demand for the Vulnerable Veterans Programme within the veterans and communities in Surrey. There have been few difficulties in identifying veterans who are in contact with the CJS. It has also been possible to meet people who would volunteer to be provide G2G support for such veterans.

We will receive referrals from HMPS, Surrey Police and probation as well as from local council officers, charities and through our continuing outreach work.

³ The proportion of female homeless ex-service personnel is around 1 in 20 people (Mike Jackson House 2016)

⁴ The huge improvement in battlefield medical treatment and recovery in the past century has led to a four fold likelihood of survival of a major wound. This means that today a significant number of veterans will need ongoing support during a longer and richer life.(ABF 2016)

It is in everybody's interests for this to happen because dealing with crime and disorder issues at an early stage prevents offending and reduces demand on key resources. Moreover it improves the lives of veterans, reserves and their families whilst enhancing the employability of ex-service personnel and improves the amenity of the communities in which they live.

Helping to stop veterans from offending and removing them from the CJS enhances the reputation of our armed forces and addresses a false but widespread public view that many veterans who have been on active service return with latent problems including PTSD.

The Vulnerable Veterans Programme by quantifying the numbers of ex-forces personnel in contact with the CJS in Surrey, supporting them to access appropriate support and mentoring them and their families will improve Lord Ashcroft's "4 R's" Recruitment, Retention, Reputation and support for our Reserves (Ashcroft, 2014).

We believe that the Vulnerable Veterans Programme has begun to provide positive and cost effective interventions for veterans and is working to halt the revolving door to offending and prison.

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